THE NEW BOOKS.

A Journey in Southern Siberia.

Assuredly no monument more to the mind of the late JEREMIAH CURTIN could have been devised than his posthumously published volume, *A Journey in Southern Siberia* (Little, Brown and Company). Mr. Curtin was widely known not only as a translator, chiefly from the Polish, but also as a linguist of great attainments and as an ardent student of folklore in many lands, the one accomplishment flowing logically from the other. This, his last work, shows his facility for acquiring a strange tongue, by ear alone, when far from youth; his delightfully clear narrative style; his power to condense in a readable and valuable form the history requisite for intelligent comprehension, and his remarkable gift of reproducing a folktale with the racy native atmosphere of the original. It is, no doubt, an outgrowth of his great unfinished "History of the Mongols," and forms a complement to it, with its description of the present day conditions of life, religion and customs among the descendants of that once mighty people, as represented by the most humble, the least advanced of them, who precisely because of their lagging culture must truly picture to us the conquerors of the ancient world. The book comes at a time when the Mongol star of destiny seems to be rising again in the East, and to presage possibly another triumphant reign, both material and intellectual, as much greater than the astounding reign of old as the modern world is greater than the ancient.

In the summer of 1900 Mr. Curtin spent two months in visiting certain Buriats of the Lake Baikal region, in eastern Siberia. The Buriats, true Mongols, inhabit the shores of three sides of this greatest fresh water lake in the Old World and Olkhon, its only island. The settlements chosen by Mr. Curtin were those on the west and northwest shores and on the sacred island, where he says dwell the only Buriats who have preserved their pure race religion, with its primitive images, archaic beliefs and philosophy. This would appear to be a slightly inadequate statement of the case, owing to the fact that Mr. Curtin obviously believed himself to be the first and only collector of these data; but the ethnographical section of the East Siberian branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society published at Irkutsk in 1889 Part I. of volume 1 of "Buriat Legends and Beliefs," collected by several persons, who examined them not only in the Balagansk district covered by our author but also from the trans-Baikal Buriats on the eastern shore of the lake and from the Selengin Buriats. These legends are absolutely identical with those he obtained, so far as the general character of the incidents is concerned, though the incidents as well as the relationships of the actors in what may be called the "Olkhon tales" are differently assorted, precisely as in the case of the variants furnished by Mr. Curtin of some of the legends.

From the mountains south of the lake, pass between these two districts, sprang Jingtis Khan and Tamerlane, or Timur Leng (the Iron Limper), and from these famous chieftains were descended the Mongol conquerors of Russia and China—Kublai Khan, the subduer of China, Burma and other lands east of India; Hulagu, who destroyed the Assassin Commonwealth of Persia, stormed Bagdad and extinguished the Abassid Kalifat; Batu, who devastated Russia, ruined Hungary, hunting its King to an island in the Adriatic, crushed the German and other forces opposed to the Mongols at Liegnitz and returned to the Volga region, where he established his chief headquarters, which figure so largely and ferociously in the history of Russia for 250 years. Here Mr. Curtin neatly calls attention to a curious reversing of the scales. When the Great Moguls, the lords of India, the descendants of Tamerlane, met Great Britain they were stripped of their empire, at the beginning of a new era in history—that of the commercial invasion, the era of the "drummer" in politics. Mongol rule was abolished in India by the British because it did not accord with their methods and objects. It was destroyed by the Russians because it was foreign, oppressive and hateful. They simply freed their land from aliens, and the conflict in Russia was patriotic. Meanwhile a Mongol group of forty-four families in western Siberia had fled before Jinghis Khan, found refuge in Asia Minor and eventually established their empire at Constantinople and became a terror to Europe. When in time they weakened Great Britain came to be the defender in chief of these western Mongols, and Russia their main and chief attacker. So the spoilers of Tamerlane's descendants in India became the active allies of the Mongols on the Bosporus and the enemy of that Russia which has pushed Mongol rule out of northern Europe. As Mr. Curtin remarks: "The Mongols bear in them at present the great mystery of the future, a mystery of great import to all men." And so Mr. Curtin set out to visit the birthplace of that mystery.

The name "Sibir" appears in the Russian chronicles for the first time in 1407; but the Russian princes had made forced acquaintance with the land beyond the Urals nearly a hundred years before, through being compelled to do homage to the Grand Khan at his capital of Karakorum, not far south of Lake Baikal; while western Siberia was known as early as the eleventh century to the merchants of Novgorod, who obtained furs from the inhabitants of the region, which they called Yugria. After 1264 Yugria was accounted a possession by "Lord Novgorod the Great" (as that haughty commonwealth officially styled itself), and paid tribute. In 1488 the Czar of Moscow added "Yugorsky" to his titles; fifteen years later his son made other titular additions, founded on Siberian conquests, and a little later still the southern part of the land became known as Sibir, from the name of the Mongol Khans' capital, Isker or Sibir. In October, 1581, Yermak expelled Khan Kuchum, took possession of Sibir and added that region and the title of "Czar of Siberia" to the possessions of the Czar of Moscow, Ivan the Terrible. After that for a while Siberia was lost to Russia, but in 1586 Tiumen, the first Russian city in Siberia, was founded, and in the following year Tobolsk. In 1590 the first colonists were sent to this region, and the next year, strangest of all exiles, the church bell of Uglitch, which had sounded the alarm when Boris Godunoff had Ivan the Terrible's youngest son killed, was banished to Tobolsk with the human criminals, and there remained until it was ceremoniously restored to Uglitch a few years ago.

But the first exiles of distinction were the nephews of the first (elected) Romanoff Tsar, sent to Pelym in 1599, by which time Russia was firmly established in Siberia. Gradually Russia worked her way eastward, and in 1622 first became acquainted with the Buriats; and it was about 1640 that Altyn Khan insisted upon a Russian envoy taking (against his will) 250 pounds of tea as a gift to Czar Michael Romanoff, since which time it has been the national beverage; and shortly afterward, the question of paying tribute to Russia having been lustily opposed by the Buriats, the Khan of Urga, in the Baikal region, finally sent an embassy to Moscow. It was during one of the persistent expeditions to exact tribute from the Siberian tribes that Dejneff rounded the northeastern point of Asia and discovered the straits known by the name of Bering, who did not pass through them until 1648, eighty years later. In 1652 Irkutsk post was established, and in the following year Fort Balagansk was established in the Buriat country and sixty Russian families were settled there. Two years later the Buriats were preparing to withdraw to the east of Lake Baikal, but listening to the counsel of their wise men they resolved to remain in their home country and yield to Russian rule. There were uprisings, however, and it was not till near the end of the seventeenth century that the Buriats, completely subdued, became peaceful Russian subjects.

Mr. Curtin was armed with a letter to each Governor in Siberia from the Minister of Finance at St. Petersburg. The Governor of Irkutsk received him cordially, assured him that every aid in the power of the Government would be furnished him, gave him letters to the district chiefs and forwarded instructions to officials all along the road to help him in every possible way, though he did not discover this last until later. Among his letters from friends in St. Petersburg to residents of Irkutsk was one to Mr. Popoff, the editor of the *Eastern Review*, who had been exiled many years before to Siberia for political reasons and preferred to remain there when free to return to Russia. Mr. Curtin met many people who had come to Siberia as exiles and are now honored and in numerous cases wealthy citizens of Irkutsk. At the house of one friend he made acquaintance with the curator of the Irkutsk Museum, who introduced him to an important Buriat, Andrei Mihailovitch Mihailoff, recommending him vigorously on the strength of the Government's favor. Mihailoff was friendly and promised cooperation, but Mr. Curtin suspected him of mental reservations, and in a measure this suspicion proved to be correct. Mr. Curtin purchased the necessary equipage and supplies and set out for Mihailoff's summer place. Thanks to his choosing the right hand road, out of deference to superstition, and making a short cut, he failed to receive at the post station a letter which Mihailoff had sent telling him not to come to his house, and making no provision for him elsewhere. Consequently, when he arrived at the Buriat's summer home, composed of half a dozen houses enclosed by a high board fence, he found his reluctant host and family seated around the central fire below the smoke hole in the roof, upon the wooden floor which surrounds it in all these genuine, octagonal native houses, engaged in drinking arhi or tarasun, the extremely intoxicating liquor distilled from the milk of mares and cows. It appeared that Mihailoff's eldest son had died, and etiquette required that the family should not leave home for nine days or see any one outside their own immediate circle.

This was Mr. Curtin's introduction to what may justly be described as the chief industry, the chief occupation and the chief joy of the Buriats: the imbibing in immense quantities of this milk whiskey, which is prepared in all considerable households. Indeed, we may wonder how the author succeeded in making his trip or obtaining any information, since nearly every Buriat man or woman he encountered, from driver to wealthy householder, seems to have been in a greater or less state of intoxication—greater rather than less. However, Mihailoff entertained Mr. Curtin with tea, vodka, beef of his own raising, and so forth, in another house, built on the Russian plan, with a good stove, such as most Buriats now occupy in winter, the native hut (modelled on the primitive tent) always used in summer being too cold. Mr. Curtin found that the custom was to have the summer and winter residences at some distance from each other, a sheltered locality being chosen for the winter abode, but in some cases both residences were in the same enclosure. Thus Mihailoff's summer encampment, so to speak, included this Russian house. Before sending Mr. Curtin on to the house of his dead son, about three miles away, as headquarters at his pleasure, the Buriat showed him his "Ongons" and "Burkans" (household gods), hung up on a rafter in a dark corner of the room as a token of deep affection for him, the man said. Other household gods are suspended on the outside of the house, and gods to protect the crops are inserted in hollows of posts protected by pent house roofs in the fields, as our author soon discovered. He was allowed to take these gods out of their places, fasten them up and photograph them, which is somewhat surprising.

Mihailoff's second son, Vassili (usually called by Mr. Curtin "Vassya"), who was in charge of the dead man's house, proved to be a very interesting person. He was a student at the Irkutsk gymnasium, had spent six years and intended to spend a seventh there. He had read a good deal, knew something of the great problems in science and in history, could talk about Darwin, the "Descent of Man," and knew something about chemistry. Best of all, he knew a great deal about his own people, and Mr. Curtin heartily congratulated him on belonging to a people who had preserved their primeval religion and still held to the customs and beliefs of their remote ancestors, the Buriats being the only Eastern Mongols who have performed this "exploit and service to science," as the author characterized it to his new host. Vassya proved to be a most intelligent and helpful guide and interpreter in Mr. Curtin's explorations. At Usturdi, where he was living, the author made a beginning of his folklore collection and of his linguistic studies, attended a part of a wedding—weddings take four days at least for the ceremony, which includes a feigned stealing of the bride after she has been duly bought of her father, dancing, feasting and numerous rites—and, most important of all, he contrived to witness the horse sacrifice. Besides the Buriat country, there is only one other place in Asia where this ceremonial, which has existed among the Mongols from time immemorial and is a wonderfully interesting survival of a primitive religion, may still be seen. The Buriats did not wish him to see it, in fact. The sacrifice takes place at Uhér, and is made by certain divisions of a clan whose founder lived near this spot, and sacrificed to the Burkans, or gods, of two hills. Mr. Curtin was quite satisfied with seeing the last two out of the nine horses sacrificed in that particularly distressing manner, which consisted of wrenching the creature's heart free from its connections by a hand thrust through an incision near the breastbone. The flesh of the horses was then boiled and eaten by the throngs of worshippers, small bits of the meat, with a little of the soup, being thrown upon the roaring fires of the stone altars.

As in all cases when sacrifices are made to the gods, whether it be of meat or of the milk whiskey, the offerings are supposed to increase infinitely in quantity and in quality by the time they reach their destination. An interesting invocation which accompanied the offerings, entreating the gods for prosperity, increase, courage and protection, was secured by the author. The vultures which swooped down undisturbed and seized their share and were fed by the people were regarded as semi-divine; that is, they were supposed to rush in front of the Burkans in flight, and so to indicate the presence of these gods. The social part of this ceremony impressed the traveller as very instructive, showing the intimate relations of gods and men common to all primitive religions, the nearness of the gods and their friendliness as they thus ate and drank with mortals. All this is most vividly shown in the folktales which he succeeded in collecting. Most of the Buriats on the east shore of Lake Baikal, he explains, touch the world of Buddhism and have become Buddhists, while these on the western shore are secluded and prefer their own primitive religion, so far. The Russians have no objections, and had rather they retained Shamanism than became Buddhists; so if they do not wish to become Christians—due invitation is made—they may remain pagans.

Precisely why Olkhon, Lake Baikal's only island, is "sacred" we are not informed. Mr. Curtin was very anxious to inspect its 200 unusually primitive Buriats and collect their tales, but the journey, although it cost considerable time and several annoying experiences, with some hardship, produced nothing of any value. His peregrinations furnished him, however, with ample knowledge as to conditions of life among the Buriats. With the exception of a few wealthy specimens who are almost Russianized in habits, the one word which properly describes them is Dirt, in the largest possible capitals. Even the rich Buriats live much like the American Indians, have no regular hours for meals, and no apparent forethought for them. Rye bread and mutton are the staples. When guests come or a family gets hungry a skeep is killed, skinned and eaten boiled. Occasionally a cow or a horse is used for food, and what meat is not eaten on the spot is dried for future use. The last concluding ceremony at a wedding consists in the bride taking her place beside the milk barrel, which always stands at the northwest corner of the fire in the square opening on the plank floor. This means that she takes formal possession of the milk of the house; and the most important work in a Buriat house and of a Buriat woman is to keep the milk barrels full and distil the tarasun. Mr. Curtin is of the opinion that the milk barrels are never empty, for they look as if they had not been washed for years. In some houses two or three barrels of sour milk stand in the room where the family lives. But neither in this case nor when a large herd of cows and many people to be fed necessitates relegating them to a shed near by are they ever covered. Consequently the milk is permeated with dust. The arsa, or substance left in the pot after the tarasun is distilled, is stored in barrels. It hardens, cracks, receives fresh contributions of curd—and of dirt—and when needed it is chopped out with an axe, mixed with rye flour and fed to the laborers. The Buriats make no cheese and very little butter, that little being utterly unfit to eat. Moreover, even when they own "Russian" houses for winter use, Mr. Curtin suspects the most advanced of them of residing in the uncomfortable Buriat hut, with no privacy save such as can be secured by curtains, and no conveniences beyond chests or wardrobes for their possessions, out of sheer love for the native dwelling; and it will be seen from the milk barrel that the native house is indispensable for a proper marriage ceremony.

The most poetical version of the origin of the trans-Baikal Buriats is as follows: A hunter one day when out shooting birds saw three beautiful swans flying toward a lake not far distant. He followed the swans, saw them come down to the water, take off their feathers, become women, and swim out from shore. These three swans were the three daughters of Esege Malan (Father Bald Head, the highest god; in fact, the highest heaven itself). The hunter stole the feathers of one of the swans, and when she came from the water she could not fly away with her sisters. He caught the maiden, took her home and made her his wife. Six children had been born to them when one day the daughter of Esege Malan distilled strong tarasun, and after her husband had drunk much she asked for her feathers and he gave them to her. That moment she turned to a swan and flew up through the smoke hole. One of her daughters, who was mending the tarasun still, tried to catch her and keep her from flying away, but only caught at her legs, which the girl's dirty hands made black. That is why swans, a sacred bird among the Buriats, have black legs. The mother circled around, came back within speaking distance of her daughter, and said: "Always at the time of the new moon you will pour out to me mare's milk and tea and scatter red tobacco." From this swan, the daughter of Esege Malan, came all the trans-Baikal Buriats. The other legend, which accounts also for the origin of the trans-Baikal Buriats, describes the origin of customs still observed at the birth and naming of a child, but its description is too long to quote.

It is interesting to note that the Buriats, like many primitive peoples, conceive of Esege Malan, the highest existence, or the world white god, as he is called in addition to the title given above, as containing a trinity of divine beings. Of him and of the first two spirits contained in him no pictures are ever made. The descendants of all these form the thousand heavenly Burkans, or gods, to whom sacrifices are offered in connection with almost everything in the daily life of the people and in the life of their legendary heroes. Other curious parallels to the Bible story (though not necessarily in any way derived from it) are to be found in the account of how wicked beings came to dwell upon the earth, and how the power of evil was overcome. The nine sons of Esege Malan quarrelled in the sky as to who should succeed their father, and the five younger sons expelled from heaven their four elder brothers, who thereupon—at some spot beyond the Arctic Ocean—created wicked creatures, Mangathais, and vile serpents, some of which could fly around and swallow people, also immense, savage dogs, and no one has been able to reach the dwelling place of these wicked Mangathais even to this day. The earth became full of evil and great disorder, and so continued for many thousand years—no man knows how long. At last Esege Malan sent to earth his grandson, Gesir Bogdo, who contended, in animal form, with a representative of his relatives the Mangathais, also in animal form. When Gesir Bogdo's spirit returned to heaven he created heroes to fight the Mangathais, the evil animals and the serpents of the north. In another version of the legend the evil spirits existed together with the good spirits "very long ago, in a world preceding this world."

It is these heroes who perform the feats described in the myths collected by Mr. Curtin and the Siberian students. These heroes bear a certain general resemblance to the Bogatyri of the Russian epic songs, and, like them, certainly represent the powers of nature. The theory of the distinguished Orientalist Benfey with regard to all European tales, and that of certain Russian authorities with regard to their Kieff and Novgorod cycles of epic songs, that they were all derived from Turko-Mongolian sources, is not greatly strengthened, however, by these fresh contributions to the subject, and assuredly the wholesale appropriation from Eastern myths claimed by one Russian writer cannot be regarded as established, in spite of the family resemblance with the Aryan myths as a whole. The Russian hero Bogatyr is not worshipped as a god in the epic songs, although "bog"—God—enters into the composition of his title, and the same word is employed by the Siberian writers on the Buriat legends. But he occasionally consults the "Dove Book," which fell down from heaven, when uncertain as to his best course of action. But each Buriat hero, as well as the lady love appointed for him, has his or her own Book of Life, which contains sailing directions of a definiteness suggestive of Fate in some instances and of crude guesswork in others. This book only occasionally descends from heaven As a rule the hero extracts it from his head, or his midriff, or his liver, by making an incision. The heroines are not so vulgar; at least the manner of producing their instructions, which may be called a *carte du pays du Tendre*, since it seems to serve in their case only to make certain which bridegroom heaven has decreed for them, is never definitely stated. Not that it seems to make much difference in the course of true love after marriage, for the lady is not infrequently faithless quite soon after the wedding, or runs away, or fails to read in her fate book instructions to welcome a second, younger and prettier wife when her husband's book clearly indicates that the gods command him to bring a rival into the house. Horses of tremendous size and powers, which clear immense distances at each leap and possess the power of speech, are common to the Mongol and the Russian legends; but while they are generally blue in the Buriat tales (as are all things, with few exceptions, which are considered beautiful), the favorite hue among the Slavonic peoples is red, and the Russian word for red also means "beautiful."

The Water of Life plays a great part in all these legends of the Buriats, as it does in the Russian Skaski, or folktales, as distinguished from the Byliny (epic songs), the true parallels of these semi-religious, semi-terrestrial Mongol myths, where people pass freely between heaven, earth and even a twilight underground realm; and curiously enough, the spring or fountain from which it wells forth is almost always close to a sacred ash tree, as in the Scandinavian mythology, though prominent a part in the daily life of the Buriats as do priests in the lives of Christian nations, we encounter another curious resemblance to Christian belief, though it is not in all probability in any was indebted to the latter. This is the virgin birth. The spirit of one of the fifty-five Tengeris, or spirits, who came forth from Esege Malan entered into a hailstone, fell to the earth and was swallowed by a girl thirteen years of age, who soon bore a son, Mindiû. He lived 300 years, established the Buriat religion, gave the Buriats all their prayers and told them of their gods.

Mr. Curtin's translator, a Christian, said that Mindiû is the same for the Buriats that Christ is for Christians. In a sense he was the first Shaman, of whom there are two sorts—those made directly by the gods (Burkans), and those who have inherited from either the male or the female branch of their family the right to their office, a sort of hereditary priesthood or apostolic succession of divine origin. But even the hereditary Shaman must have his right confirmed by the gods; and a child or young person is supposed to be acceptable to the Burkans when the spirit of a dead relative, a Shaman, comes while he is sleeping and takes his spirit to the residences of the earthly and heavenly Burkans, who conduct him through their mansions, show him their possessions, power and wealth, and instruct him in all things. In the morning his spirit returns to its body. To a person selected directly by the Burkans the spirit of a Shaman who has died within four or five years comes at night while he is sleeping and conducts his spirit to the Burkans. But whether the person is chosen directly by the Burkans or has inherited the right to be a Shaman, he is educated in exactly the same manner by a Shaman guide, who instructs his spirit while his body sleeps during a space which may extend over several years. Even after his education is completed, which is known by a peculiar sign, it is a long time before a young Shaman can offer sacrifice; often there are years of trial and the Burkans may leave him at any time as unfit or incapable when he becomes no better than any other man.

Impressive ceremonies in the presence of the people mark the advancement of the young Shaman to the rank of a Shaman with full powers. In the course of it the young Shaman removes all his clothing and remains naked, much as is prescribed by the ritual of the Greco-Russian Church for a man who is being made a monk. Strange and varied powers are ascribed to Shamans; some can cut a man's head off; he walks around without it, they put it on again and he is as good as ever. Some Shamans can duplicate the feat of Moses in causing water to spring forth from a rock; they can stab the central pillar of the yurta (hut), and a stream of the precious milk whiskey will flow out. Almost any Shaman can dance on fire; there are others who can ride on horseback through the two walls of a yurta and leave no opening. They can raise the dead, or at least recall the departed spirit after death seems to the ordinary human observer to have come; and they have nothing whatever to do with marriages or with deaths after it is certain that the spirit has left the body and cannot be persuaded to return. It must be admitted that there is no very sharp distinction between the religious myths and what may be called the epic myths, nor between the divine powers of the Shamans and the magic powers of the heroes and the wicked Mangathais, who appear to be pretty equally endowed in that respect.

In the epic battles between the heroes and the Mangathais (some of whom have as many heads as a Buddhist deity) teeth and nails are literally employed in a repulsive manner, which does very little harm to either combatant until the whereabouts of his "life" (sometimes there is a second life also) has been discovered by his enemy, either from the semi-omniscient Book of Life or by magic. This "life" often is contained in a number of skylarks or other birds, concealed under a stone in an inaccessible spot in a distant kingdom. If the hero kills a part of the birds the Mangathai falls sick; if he crushes all of them the wicked being dies, though there never seems to be any certainty that either Mangathai or hero will stay dead for any length of time, which affords bewildering complications and the opportunity for the prolonged exercise of the extraordinary Buriat invention. A favorite punishment for enemies is suggestive of the Chinese "death of a thousand cuts"; and another cruel though popular method of exterminating some infant (quite ineffectual if the child is a semi-divine hero) suggests the religious ballad sung by the Russian Kalyeki Perekhozhie (perambulatory cripples or blind psalm Singers), which narrates how the Virgin Mary hid the Christ child from the hostile Jews in a fiery furnace, and after the departure of the enemies the infant was found playing with apples in a flowery mead, uninjured by the flames.

Like Volga Vseslavitch in the Russian Cycle of the Elder Heroes, who at the age of a day and a half requests his mother to swathe him in strong steel mail and place in his right hand a heavy leaden mace weighing 12,000 pounds, the Buriat heroes are extremely precocious, though they rarely issue orders before the age of three days, and like Volga they possess the power of assuming any form they find expedient. As for the Mangathais, they are at no disadvantage in the last named respect, for they can appear as angels of light, so to speak, and cozen Esege Malan himself out of the "life" which he is carefully guarding, just as the hero, to gain his ends, can appear as an imp of darkness.

The Shamans as doctors are of course merely conjurers, like the North American Indian "medicine men"; they make their diagnosis of the case by divination and heal by sacrifices, prayer and occasionally by the touch of a red hot iron, or hot water. The Buriats are accustomed (when the patient dies after this sort of "sympathetic" healing) to keep the body three days and to "make remembrance" for nine days—a curious coincidence, so far as it goes, with the customs of the Russian Church in the case of its dead, though the explanations would hardly coincide. Like many other peoples the Buriats believe that the spirit has the form of the body but is invisible except to persons having "second sight" and that spirits can assume the forms of living people when they wish, producing the effect of being clothed in real garments; for the spirits of the dead wear not only the garments in which their bodies have been buried but also all their old garments for many years back.

Mr. Curtin's book is, in short, a mine of curious and valuable information. Had he been able to revise it undoubtedly he would have eliminated certain misprints, like "Balazansk" and "Balagansk" for "Balagansk," and he would have realized the imperative need for a more detailed and complete index than the general index and the index of incidents here provided afford.

Three Women.

The fact that the feminine half of humanity to-day is seeking some new, self-formulated definition of its place and destiny gives pertinence to biographies of women influential in a less assertive age. Among such books issuing from contemporary presses may be named HILAIRE BELLOC'S study of *Marie Antoinette* (Doubleday, Page & Co.), the *Memoirs of the Duchesse de Dino* (Scribners) and Mrs. CLEMENTS PARSONS'S presentation of the career of *The Incomparable Siddons* (Putnams).

The biography of Marie Antoinette outranks the others alike by virtue of the author's literary skill and by the importance of its subject. Mr. Belloc's Antoinette ever dominates the court and nation of her time, and yet is seen, whether in the days of greatest influence or the final tragedy of the guillotine, helpless in the power of enemies within and without the court. Indeed, Mr. Belloc himself approaches his elaborate treatise more in the spirit of Greek drama than as a dispassionate presentation of historic fact. He presupposes an "exact convergence of accident that drew around Marie Antoinette an increasing pressure of doom, * * * uniting at last drove her with a precision that was more than human, right to her predestined end. * * * Behind such causes of misfortune as can at least be traced in some appalling order there appear as we read her history causes more dreadful because they are mysterious; ill omened dates, fortunes quite unaccountable and continually a dark coincidence reawaken in us that native dread of destiny which the faith, after centuries of power, has hardly conjured."

In reading the book this is to be kept in mind; it is as an interpreter rather than as a mere chronicler that Mr. Belloc adds one more record to the many narratives of the sorrowful Queen, harried to a high destiny for which she was so uneducated that she could scarce sign her name to the marriage register and so ill trained that her very virtues turned traitor to her. If, however, the historian is not content merely to retell a more than twice told tale his book is not lacking in that accuracy which is well nigh the first merit of such work. Mr. Belloc shows a praiseworthy diligence in cross-questioning the witness of history, the scope of his inquiry being enlarged to include events in Europe and America no less than the French affairs germane to his task. He intends that we shall attain some degree of understanding of the inner life of his heroine even though he pauses with a certain reverent reserve before the psychology of that spirit so broken on the wheel of circumstance. Thus he traces tentatively the mental influences of her mismanaged childhood in Austria, her probable girlish impressions of a French gayety that included a Du Barry much in the foreground, and so on to the graver impulses of her maturity, when motherhood had brought some tardy education; but his interpretive mission stops short before a speculative research into the inner recess of her soul. Although frequently preoccupied with interests having but slight connection with his subject, and at such times even royalty is forced patiently to wait in the anteroom of the author's attention, yet in the main Hilaire Belloc contents himself with the not unusual estimate of Marie Antoinette as a woman commonplace in intellect, temperamentally pleasure seeking and impulsive, her salient endowment being an exuberant vitality which saved her from premature annihilation but drove her headlong to the final catastrophe.

His concern is chiefly with causes outside that influenced her life, and these unexpected forays into extraneous lines of research result in a sort of stolen wealth that adds richness if not unity to the whole. Hilaire Belloc aims for a place beside those great historian exponents of the world drama who when recorded facts fail impress imagination into honorable service in order to vitalize the narrative. His skill and subtle charm as a writer of satirical fiction, not sufficiently appreciated on this side of the Atlantic, is constantly employed to vivify every well known incident in the life of Marie Antoinette. Yet it must be admitted at times his novelist sense of the "situation" deludes him into romantic extravagances out of place in a work of this kind. For example, ending the Queen's first arraignment before her Judges, we have sentences such as this: "On the terrace of his castle in Germany that night George of Hesse saw the White Lady pass, the ghost without a face that is the warning of the Hapsburgs, and the hair of his head stood up."

The foregoing is apparently offered in all seriousness and represents a style of thought that is not to be confounded with a frequent poetic view of his subject which inspires him to the use of striking symbols and to illuminating flights of pure imagination. When, for example, he compares the early shifts and strains of the adventuress De La Motte, afterward go-between for Cardinal Rohan in the necklace affair, with the seeming triviality of a "drifting rag in a great city, but a rag infected with the plague," his pictorialism adds a delight that is the more welcome since it comes without right of expectation. And because it is unreasonable to expect qualities unaccompanied by their related defects, the reader is patient with Belloc's contemptuous flings at contemporary events that have incurred his displeasure. We accept with good humored patience that the author's mental dragnet should catch strange fish in each heavy haul. We forgive the "personal equation" when it presents the affair Dreyfus or disestablishment in France as being of interest even if the author finds no close connection between such happenings and his subject. It is foolish to complain when his fancy and inventive genius turn will-o'-the-wisp and land our attentive minds in an unexpected bog, but it is likewise important that serious study of this temperamental version of history should be attended by a qualifying appreciation of Mr. Belloc's enviable literary flexibility and his tendency to turn literary handsprings.

Especially noteworthy in consideration of the alert partisanship of the author and the debatable nature of the revolutionary era is his evident aspiration toward a just estimate and moderation of statement. The dignity of his whole scheme does not allow space for the customary sentimental heroics which would present to our tearful consideration an entire aristocracy, getting a last free ride at the expense of a hospitable nation anxious that no one should be overlooked in the general hurry. The revolution itself, a movement frequently denounced as the natural sequence to an atheistical mentality, is given the august stamp of an Almighty decree. "God intended the Revolution," says Mr. Belloc on page 283, thus placing the responsibility for this sanguinary episode where even the raging blasphemies of the French mob might have hesitated. During the Terror the Deity was mocked in a hundred malignant ways; a widespread bravado attacked all religious manifestation, but not the unique insult of a serious claim that the Governor of all the World was an accomplice and acquiescent. This suggestion of being a party to the secret councils of the Most High is not an isolated instance in the book and should be remarked before tribute is paid to the author's exceptional talents. In the main he has spread a broad canvas, and after the superb and lavish style of Velasquez's "Alva" shows us a single figure of heroic proportion, and around this marching armies, a landscape stretched to the far horizon and a vast mysterious reach of sky. Mr. Belloc's portrait is vital, sympathetic, yet tense with the tragic inevitability of the disastrous career of Marie Antoinette.

The "Memoirs of the Duchesse de Dino" afford glimpses of French and English society that are gay, reassuring and always unburdened by the sombre reviewings of the world dramatist. The so-called philosophy of history is conspicuously absent here and the writer's confident tone rings true if not deep. A woman of noble birth, this niece of the Prince de Talleyrand and wife of the Comte Edmond de Talleyrand-Périgord had opportunity of knowing with some degree of intimacy every eminent and famous personage prominently identified with the changing history of Europe during the critical first half of the century just past. The Princess Radziwill (née Castellane), granddaughter and literary legatee of the Duchesse, edits the volume and furnishes elaborate biographical notes. Only four of the threescore and ten years of the writer's life find record in these published memoirs (1832-1835), her reminiscences centring chiefly about the Court of St. James's during the short reign of William IV. and the French régime of Louis Philippe. The predominance given by the writer to her life at the English embassy brings us more in touch with the country and times of Canning, Palmerston and Peel than the men of the land to which she was native. The Duchesse de Dino was interested in politicians rather than politics. An occasional allusion in passing to the great movements of the time is all she allows herself; possibly a diplomatic reserve was forced upon this keen sighted woman in writing the letters which make up the present book.

In place of more serious matters there are pages of gossip about men and women, some of it too trivial to be worth publishing, mere commonplaces of meeting and passing the time of day, of interest only to the contemporary reader who possibly also knew those with whom greetings were exchanged; letters familiar and affectionate, rather than essays on political economy. The book at this distance of time interests us mainly in details of daily intercourse often no more elaborate and sometimes almost as intimate as those which give Pepys's "Diary" its unique charm. The frank artlessness of the "Diary," however, is not present in the memoirs. The Duchesse de Dino betrays throughout a conscious sense of an attentive circle and of careful provisions of her will in order that her letters should not fail ultimately to reach the public eye. Historically they have the same value as that accorded contemporary gossip, which, it must be remembered, passes from one person to another, often being not even the personal conviction of those who idly put it in circulation. It is not altogether flattering to our estimate of the dignity of posterity as the final court of appeal that a writer who was in a position to know the kernel of many affairs of state, of which record gives us but the shell, should have prepared for the judgment of another generation mainly amusing bits such as that, during a strike in London when all tailor shops were closed, invitations to a ball sent out by Lady Lansdowne were inscribed, "The gentlemen to appear in their old coats."

The memoirs are a mine of tittle-tattle to which historical perspective gives some value. Serious matters are occasionally touched upon, some light being thrown upon the various efforts coming from many directions and covering years of time to bring about the reconciliation to religion of the Prince de Talleyrand which culminated in a tardy peace made on his deathbed. It is a matter about which historians have ever been curious and record noncommittal. Her conversations with Louis Philippe also give some importance to her memoirs, his complaint to her, privately uttered, "I have to be director in all things and master in nothing," offering some personal explanation of his failure as a statesman. As a whole, however, only those who eagerly devour items under the dubious caption of "Fashionable Intelligence" will find pleasure in the book. For the serious student both the virtues and the failings of the memoirs are unintentionally summed up by the titled authoress in her humble answer to the criticisms of Louis Philippe. In an intimate moment the King deplored the sex of the heir to the English throne, and to-day we cannot but smile over criticism from a man so inefficient upon that most stolidly successful sovereign Victoria. "What a deplorable thing to see little girl kings in a time like the present," cried his Majesty in the midst of a dissertation on the disadvantages of female rule. In reply the Duchesse de Dino answered that M. de Talleyrand's epigram regarding wits was equally applicable to her own sex: "They were useful for anything but sufficient for nothing." So with these memoirs: a gay and modish atmosphere charms us into forgetfulness of the essentially commonplace nature of the whole.

Turning from a woman from whom an aroused nation demanded more than she had ability to give and from another to whom the great world gave more than she had capacity to receive, we come to the incomparable Siddons, who queened it in her day by virtue of her own beauty and magnetism, ruling loyal, willing subjects by the divine right of genius. The compelling power of a royalty that was of natural rather than national endowment finds striking illustration in an incident related of Sarah Siddons's girlhood at a time when temporarily she abandoned the stage for the inferior position of (practically) lady's maid to Lady Mary Great Reed. This daughter of the Duke of Ancaster is quoted as saying that "she used always to feel an irresistible inclination to rise from her chair when her queenly looking dependent entered the room."

Mrs. Clements Parsons, the latest biographer of the famous actress, comes to her task armed not only with the study of a long list of authoritative documents, memoirs and contemporary criticisms but also with a previous successful venture into histrionic biography, "Garrick and His Circle," to her credit. Like Hilaire Belloc, Mrs. Parsons paints a portrait the general features of which are already familiar to the reading public. To the narration of a great career triumphant over early failure, professional malice, physical disability, poverty and the distraction of domestic worry Mrs. Parsons brings a graceful discoursive style. If this lacks the dramatic force and pictorial richness of Mr. Belloc's pen, it compensates with that distinction and charm which result from technical ease and a natural talent.

Mrs. Parsons never allows the interest of the reader to flag throughout a bulky volume of nearly three hundred pages. She demonstrates practically that she finds no reason for agreeing with Thomas Campbell, the poet admirer and early biographer, who complained of his subject: "Dear, good Mrs. Siddons! She was a very angel, but devils make better stuff for a biography." Mrs. Siddons's career, in spite of a philistine stolidity of character, was varied, brilliant and endlessly interesting, sufficient to impress even that Frenchman who put in a frivolous plea for "one redeeming vice" in the spiritual endowment of George Washington.

In a day when social ostracism was in large measure still the Thespian fate Mrs. Siddons won for herself a place among the eminent men and women of her time, with whom she enjoyed an esteem so general that even Dr. Johnson's ponderous approbation was not lacking. After his classic interview with her at his house in Bolt court, Fleet street, that "venerable luminary" decided Mrs. Siddons to be unspoiled by the two powerful corrupters of mankind, praise and money. Her work as an actress proved her not only technically expert as few stars of the British stage before or since, but in addition she brought a mind creative and with the invaluable gifts of observation and recognition. Her mentality was alert even in the days when the "grand manner" was still a dominant superstition, to make her an early exponent of realism, of that artistic tendency which turns for a model to the environing mystery we call life.

A woman of strong character, her career as a business manager is well nigh unique in a profession where thrift and financial acumen find few examples. On the social side she proved a tactful, gracious hostess, a faithful friend and a mother remarkable alike for firmness and devotion. She serves to silence that prejudicial view of a woman's admittance to a public sphere on the plea that it unfits or prevents the sex from adequately filling its own place in the universal scheme of things. Her life proves that the strength of will necessary to success outside the home will by the same token cope victoriously with problems within it. The double nature of her triumphant career as artist and woman—and the following quotation makes evident this priority of rank in her estimation—is best expressed in the oft quoted declaration that she "had never acted so well as once when her heart was heavy concerning the loss of a child," and also in her letter to Mrs. Pennington: "I must go dress for Mrs. Beverly. My soul is well tuned for scenes of woe and it is a great relief from the struggles I am continually making to wear a face of cheerfulness at home that I can at least upon the stage give full vent to the heart which swells with its weight almost to bursting, and then I pour it all out upon my innocent auditors." Perhaps more than aught else it was this close connection in an artificial age between living and acting that made Sarah Siddons famous. Her life was first of all in her art and her art was vital with her life blood.

Sprinkling a Trestle.

From Popular Mechanics.

A wooden trestle on the Klamath Lake Railroad, in Oregon, is protected from fire in the dry season by a system of sprinklers which keep it continually wet, a pipe runs the entire length of the trestle between the tracks and at short distances are holes through which the water is sprayed over the structure.